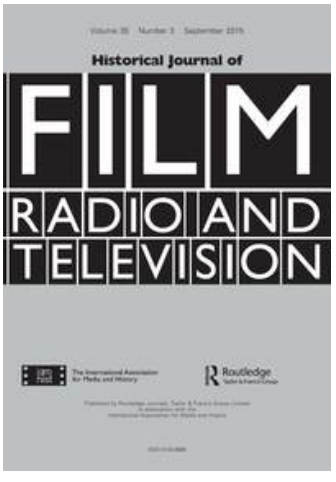

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Nationalism and the cinema in France: political mythologies and film events, 1945-1995

Gertjan Willems[a]

[a] Ghent University

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That the New Hollywood directors were watching and listening—and not only because of their taste for screen violence—is no secret. On the back cover and in the introduction of Wild's book, Kurosawa is introduced once more through the praise of Francis Ford Coppola, Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese. In his own autobiography, Kurosawa prefers to call attention to his Japaneseness. The criticism that he was mostly addressing a western audience, was the one most resented by Kurosawa. In *Remaking Kurosawa. Translations and Permutations in Global Cinema*, D.P. Martinez traces how his films inspired new imaginations worldwide, ranging from Japanese and Italian remakes of *Rashomon* to influences on films as varied as George Cukor's *Les Girls* (1957), Alain Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) and television series such as *The Killing* and *Boomtown*.

Peter Wild addresses the global appeal of Kurosawa's oeuvre, referring to several films and television series as recent as *Breaking Bad* (88), although, as he set himself out to do, he never strays far from the man and his movies. The 48 small black and white images don't do justice to this bright and affectionate account. However, even better illustrated, it would be impossible to rival the splendour of Peter Cowie's *Akira Kurosawa. Master of Cinema* (2010). Cowie wrote a 'pictorial driven tribute', a beautiful—and expensive—monograph, lavishly illustrated with Kurosawa's drawings, his watercolour paintings, set photos, shooting script pages, film posters, family pictures and numerous film stills. Peter Wild expresses his admiration for Kurosawa through words rather than pictures. His descriptions inspire awe for the brilliancy of a shot or the boldness of Kurosawa's ventures. A deep respect hovers over every page of the book. Richie warns for the fact that Kurosawa has become a sacred icon since his death in 1998. When the dead become classics, they turn into monuments. What was once most alive about them, disappears. Since for Peter Wild, Kurosawa is clearly a magnificent monument that crushes criticisms, it is no small achievement that he is able to breathe life and sensibility into this giant of Japanese cinema.

Isolde Vanhee
LUCA School of Arts

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Nationalism and the cinema in France: political mythologies and film events, 1945–1995
Hugo Frey
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viii + 242 pp., illus., bibliography, index, £60.00 (cloth)
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Frey opens his book by positioning it as complementary to the rise of scholarship on the transnational dimensions of cinema. Although he sees transnational and national cinema as two sides of the same coin, Frey concentrates on the latter,

thereby focusing on France in the period 1945–1995. The aim of the book is two-fold. On the one hand, Frey aims to discern the 'political myths' (10, in keeping with Christopher Flood's *Political myth: a theoretical introduction*, 1996) or ideological values of the narratives that films can incorporate, thereby looking in particular for 'nationalistic subtexts' (4) in French films. At the methodological level, this implies a textual film analysis. On the other hand, Frey puts forward the concept of the 'film event' (11, in keeping with Marco Ferro's *Cinéma et histoire*, 1993) or the societal interactions that films can evoke. In this respect, he aims to examine how the reception of specific films is 'coloured by nationalist discourses' (4). Methodologically, this implies a historical reception analysis of the public discourse surrounding the selected films. The in-depth analysis of an impressive number of both mainstream and specialist press writings is, without doubt, one of the main achievements of this book. Frey is at his best when describing and analysing the public discourse surrounding the films (e.g. Claude Lelouch's *Un homme et une femme* (1966), Andrzej Wajda's *Danton* (1983) and many others), thereby providing interesting insights into the societal meaning of the films and the place of cinema in French public debates.

According to the title and the two main goals of the book, one would expect a thorough discussion of the debates around the highly contested concepts of nation, nationalism, nation-building and national identity. Nevertheless, the book only briefly describes 'the national idea' as 'a modern construct' and France as an 'imagined community' (in keeping with Benedict Anderson's well-known phrase) to which cinema can contribute (7). Frey further adheres to Michel Winock's distinction between a Republican imaginary of France as 'socially inclusive and founded on the notion that citizenship is about a loyalty to the constitution' and an organic or counter-revolutionary imaginary of France, which is based on 'a perceived set of cultural values (…) and ethnic and cultural traditions and practice' (8). This short theoretical positioning leaves many conceptual questions unanswered, including the basic use of the term 'nationalism' and its relation to the term 'nation', which is mostly used in the sense of a 'country'. In addition, the book does not engage substantively with the academic debate on the relationship between nationalism and cinema, and although Frey mentions in passing authors like Jean-Michel Frodon, Ginette Vincendeau and Susan Hayward, who have elaborated on issues concerning the national question and cinema in France.

Notwithstanding this lack of interaction with existing academic debates, as well as some typographical inaccuracies (e.g. 'Ernst Gellner' (7), 'the Lumières brothers from Lyons' (24)), *Nationalism and the cinema in France* offers an original and meticulously researched historical investigation of a highly interesting selection of French cinema culture. The originality of the book is, for example, clearly exemplified by the first chapter, which gives a fresh reading of François Truffaut's *La nuit Américaine* (1973); Agnès Varda's 100 years of cinema commemoration film *Les cent et une nuits de Simon Cinéma* (1995) and other films about films (including critical and even sarcastic works by Jean-Luc Godard and Bertrand Blier), which have, for the most part, been previously interpreted in cinephilic terms rather than as celebrations of the greatness of France as the home of cinema. One of the merits of this book is indeed the revelation of how subtle and very often unnoticed forms of nation-building can be present in a modern society, which Frey rightly links to

Michael Billig's concept of 'banal nationalism'. Chapter 2, which addresses how a selection of French films has mediated national history (particularly wartime resistance), and Chapter 3, on the nationalist subtexts of (mainly the reception of) Claude Lelouch's *Un homme et une femme* (1966) and other melodramas from the 1960s and 1970s, complete the first part of the book, which offers an analysis of how cinema has contributed, often in subtle and sophisticated ways, to discourses of French grandeur, pride and glory.

The second part of the book consists of four chapters that focus on more negatively defined and often much more explicit and essentialist nationalistic discourses concentrating on the role of non-French 'others' (what Frey refers to as 'hard nationalism'). Frey begins with an examination of the anti-Americanism that runs through the French protests against economic and trade agreements that are seen to threaten French cinema culture, pointing out that such anti-Americanism is much less (explicitly) present in individual films. The following chapter scrutinizes how certain types of films (particularly action films) 'perpetuated patriotic and defensive colonialist myths and stereotypes' (129), after which he focuses on the public controversy in France around films referring to the Algerian War of Independence (particularly Gillo Pontecorvo's *La bataille d'Alger* (1966)). Next, Frey discusses anti-Semitic elements in French films and cinema culture, with special attention to the short period in 1989 when director Claude Autant-Lara was elected as a member of the European Parliament for the far-right National Front l and caused controversy with his anti-Semitic statements. The final chapter of the book examines the extreme-right sympathies of Alain Delon, Brigitte Bardot and Gérard Blain and the reactionary protests against Martin Scorcese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988). By focusing upon the extreme-right in these last two chapters, Frey offers an original and most timely analysis of the National Front's relationship with cinema. As in the previous chapters, this analysis insightfully illustrates the pivotal role that films can play in society.

Gertjan Willems
Ghent University

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Inside the historical film
Bruno Ramirez
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Bruno Ramirez is a professor of history at the University of Montreal and a specialist in Italian immigration to Quebec and North America, as well as French Canadian emigration to the United States. Speaking specifically of the Italians, he is interested in their integration or assimilation in their new countries, and in the